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ABSTRACT

Provided is the transcript of Part IV of a five-part series on gifted children in the schools, presented by Options in Education -- a weekly radio broadcast devoted to coverage of news, features, policy, and people in the field of education on National Public Radio. The topic "Problems of Parenting" is covered with an introduction and discussion of such issues as parent roles, attitudes, discipline, labeling, talent identification, peer acceptance, and behavior problems. Among participants listed are gifted and talented children and their parents, and such educators and experts as B. Boston, R. Slencynska, M. Farrell, and G. Robb. (IM)

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INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM #30
THE GIFTED AND TALENTED
No. 4 of 5

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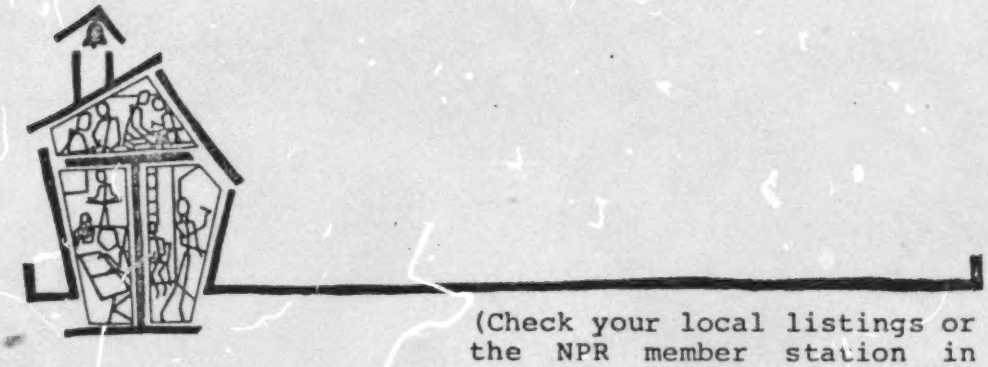

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(OPENING THEME)

BLAIR: I'm Wendy Blair with NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

(MUSIC)

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a news magazine about all the issues in education -- from the ABC's of preschool to the alphabet soup of government programs. If you've ever been to school, we have something that will interest you.

STUDENT: My parents really gave me the backing I needed and they really trusted my judgment.

MERROW: This is John Merrow. That young woman makes the relationship between a gifted child and her parents sound so simple. But it isn't really -- not for the kids, their parents or the schools.

(MUSIC -- "Be Kind to Your Parents")

BLAIR: We continue our series on gifted children with a look at the problems of parenting. Earlier we counted the gifted (approximately 2.5 million most say), and we found out how to identify them (usually with an I.Q. score of 130 or above); and we listened to arguments about how they ought to be treated in schools. Some say they should be treated no differently than anyone else -- others say we spend far too little on special programs for the gifted. But schools have children for only part of the day. This week it's the parents' turn.

PARENT: I think one of the greatest frustrations of parents is not knowing where to go for their help in how to cope with these children. The best friends I have right now are fellow mothers. It's a group therapy for us. It's something you don't talk with your neighbors about over coffee. They can say they sympathize, but they say, "Oh, your child is gifted. He has no problems in school. He shouldn't have, you know -- he'll always be top of everything. He'll be a leader and everything." Well, that's not true, because when my son comes home and said, "Today, I purposely wasn't the best on the playground, so that I can have some friends at recess," because he knows he isn't going to have any friends in the classroom.

PARENT: What about these gifted that are doing their ability, supposedly, and yet, there is no challenge. Where do we go?

PARENT: I think one of the biggest problems in this whole situation is the games which the gifted children play in order to achieve the recognition indicated. I know that a couple of my sons are right in the midst of this, one in the university now and one in middle school. It's necessary for them to play games which do not make it conducive to their potential in order to maintain a social atmosphere that is acceptable. And, in fact, one of them had become a social introvert because of this.

PARENT: In America we're supposed to have the right. We're not supposed to be put in these slots. And then I get faced with, okay, education is for the average.

PARENT: I got interested in working with the gifted because I saw how lonesome these kids were. Girls are lost. There are very few girls that make use of the tremendous potential that they have.

BLAIR: Those were parents in Minneapolis talking with Reporter Connie Goldman. Are they typical? We'll hear from other parents later in the program.

(MUSIC)

Earlier in this series, Dr. Bruce Boston argued for special programs for the gifted, but he hasn't lost sight of the fact that gifted children are, first of all, children. He talked with John about parents of gifted children.

DR. BRUCE BOSTON

DR. BRUCE BOSTON: They have a lot of problems. One, of course, is, you know, now that I've discovered that I've got a genius on my hands, in an extreme case, what do I do about that? How do I find an educational environment that's going to allow my child to develop in the way that is most commensurate with my child's abilities.

Another problem that parents of gifted children have has to do with siblings -- how does Johnny relate to Suzy, who's not gifted? The kinds of peer problem that gifted children have. Also it's sometimes an uncomfortable thing for a parent to realize that their kids are, potentially at least, smarter than they are, not wiser perhaps, but smarter. One of the things that people who work with gifted children stress over and over again is that the single most important factor to remember about parenting a gifted child is that you are parenting a child who happens to be gifted. Let's not blow out of proportion the cognitive ability of this child, but realize that it is a child who has needs for warmth, care, love, affection, guidance, wisdom, discipline, just the same as any other child. These kids are not freaks. They simply have special abilities that need nurture. And the problem, therefore, for the parent, becomes one really of resources.

MERROW: You can also have the problem of competition, a parent who can't cope with the fact that the kid's brain is more able than the mother's or the father's. Doesn't that happen where you get parents who actively compete with their own children?

BOSTON: Oh, it does, but I don't think that's nearly the problem that a lot of people might think. More than anything, they're interested in what's best for their child. If they have a problem, it lies somewhat in the other direction. It's more in the direction of sometimes thinking that Johnny is capable of more than he is capable of, or that he is brighter than maybe he really is, or there's the matter of cutting both ways -- there's excessive pride on the part of parents of gifted children. But, very interestingly, not once they get rolling on being involved in finding the kinds of education provisions for their children that are necessary for the kids. That pride factor begins to diminish, and it becomes really that the parent moves into a kind of problem solving role with respect to the child's educational environment rather than taking on a kind of angel and Gabriel syndrome of trumpeting the abilities of their kid.

MERROW: It's often true, isn't it, that parents put themselves aside in a way, in the sense that perhaps parents of Dorothy Hamill, the figure skater, put their own identities aside in order to further her career?

BOSTON: I don't know how common it is. It certainly is a kind of thing that happens and to the extent that it happens, I don't think, personally, that's a very healthy thing. A child needs a parent, not a program director, not an advocate for the child with the school system. It needs a parent and to the extent that parents of gifted children force themselves into the backgrounds so that their child can stand out and shine, to that same extent they are denying the child one of the things that the child needs most, namely, strong parenting.

BLAIR: Dr. Bruce Boston of the Council for Exceptional Children in Reston, Virginia.

Peggy Gold is a ten-year-old from West Hartford. She studies at the Talcott Mountain Science Center for Gifted Children in Connecticut. John asked Peggy to tell him the three most important things about herself. Here's what happened.

PEGGY GOLD

PEGGY GOLD: Well, I have a little brother named Timothy, and he's five-years-old and he's in kindergarten.

MERROW: That's not really about yourself, you know.

GOLD: I know. I'm taking ice skating lessons, and I'm doing figure skating, and I'm trying to get better.

MERROW: Do you want to be like Dorothy Hamill?

GOLD: Yes. I also take tennis lessons and I'm not that good at tennis, though. I'm better at ice skating than I am at tennis.

MERROW: So, you don't want to be like Chris Evert, then?

GOLD: No. And every summer I go to Oregon, because my father was born there, and we go hiking and things like that. It's really fun.

MERROW: It's funny. How come you didn't say that you come to Talcott Mountain? Isn't that one of the most important things about you?

GOLD: Yes.

MERROW: You didn't say that, though.

GOLD: I forgot.

(MUSIC -- "Much More")

BLAIR: Peggy Gold is lucky. Connecticut has one of the better programs for gifted children in the country, and she is in it. She's also happy and well adjusted, but giftedness can be a problem for the child and for the parents. Often others in the community will react strongly against the idea of special education for gifted children. These Minneapolis parents of gifted children describe their own situation to Reporter Connie Goldman..

MINNEAPOLIS PARENTS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

PARENT: We tried to get additional interest in the Minneapolis Chapter of Minnesota Council for the Gifted. We scheduled a number of meetings through working with the local principals and school officials, and so forth. And time and time again, we bombed out. And one of the most interesting bomb outs was on the north side when we had two or three meetings, we did get a few parents, and we began describing characteristics of gifted. And the first thing that happened was a few eyebrows started going up and, then, either one way or the other -- the one way: you people are a batch of Communists in view of the way you're talking here, or you people are a batch of segregationist racists because you're talking about putting people into special categories. We want no part of you, and they'd get up and walk out.

I think that we're in a competitively oriented society, abnormally so. I think more and more psychologists are beginning to realize that competition in society is one of our big onuses. It really inhibits productivity in the long run, although they say it's supposed to promote productivity. And, so, we have competition all the way along. Well, now, when average societal groups see a person who can easily win, they in effect begin to band together in groups to defeat them. And I think from what I have seen in the Minneapolis area -- it's kind of a bad indictment, I dare say, but you see groups of parents who are concerned with their own social status, their own social climbing, and they want to put behind them, out of the way of their children people who can easily compete with their children and put their children behind scenes so to speak.

PARENT: I disagree with him so completely that I really can't actually respond to him. I think the problem seems to be that we have difficulty with the students in class when there's a great disparity between what their potentials are and what they are in fact achieving. And this is going to give you trouble with -- we were talking about somebody who is retarded or somebody who is gifted. It is a disparity between the two.

PARENT: I'd like to challenge that. My son in the Minneapolis schools in northeast Minneapolis, both in Wake Park, Northeast, and Edison, was attacked physically by people who knew he was a "brain," as they said. They had -- he had valises ripped out of his hands. I gave him four different brief cases, some of my old ones, and everyone of those was ripped to shreds by people in the hall who grouped up. And when this was approached at the neighborhood level, it turned out that their parents actually encouraged these kids to put these people out of the way. And this is a fact.

PARENT: That does not happen all over the city.

PARENT: It seems to me that is one of the problems that a talented child seems to have, is that he grows so quickly in some areas that he does not really learn how to get along with people. I know my son has had the same kinds of experience. That's because he's a mean kid, not inherently mean, but he doesn't know how to behave. He doesn't know how to get along.

PARENT: I have had parents of gifted children come to me and say, if we were asked to have our children tested, we'd go down and pound on the superintendent's desk and say, what kind of a gestapo agent are you. They don't want it.

PARENT: I happen to have a gifted child, too. And the teacher called me in and asked me if I would please put her in a special class, I mean a special school, some other school, a private school. And my husband and I were rather surprised that they'd make such a request, so we went home and talked it over with my daughter. She was in the fifth grade at the time, and we just asked her how she felt about it. And we told her, and she said, "Mother, if I'm smarter, I don't want anybody to know it." She said, "I'm going to stay with my own grade. I'm going to go to the same school that I go to." And she said, "I'm going to live here the rest of my life and I'm going to be with these people, and I don't want them to think that I am one whit different or better than they."

PARENT: Many teachers don't want gifted children. They are noisy. They are question askers. Sometimes they ask questions that the teacher can't answer. It embarrasses the teacher. The teacher calls them troublemakers. And until Minneapolis, at any rate, because that's the only school system I know about, put some money into gifted children, we're not wasting any money because we don't put any money in, except for Mr. Littlequist's class. Practically, there's no recognition of the gifted. Those children who are recognized as gifted you very often find that if you try and transfer them out of a school into another school or another class where they might be more acceptable, you know, where there might be classes, the principals and the teachers all of a sudden say, I don't want them to leave my class, because he raises that class average. You know, I mean, what principal wants to give all of his bright children, as it were, because those are the ones that raise the reading scores and keep their average up. So, we have a real problem of politically having it acceptable for these children to be recognized as gifted and then do something about it as soon as the principal says, I have a gifted child -- do something about it -- he may be taken away from him.

MERROW: Emotions ran high at that meeting last year. Minneapolis may not be typical, just as Connecticut isn't. Yet, those parents echo many of the common ideas about the gifted -- they're different, lucky, weird, teachers don't like them, teachers don't want to lose them. It's a bundle of contradictions. And all parents wonder what their children will be like when they grow up.

(MUSIC -- PIANO)

RUTH SLENCYNSKA

RUTH SLENCYNSKA: I wanted very much to go out and play with Helen and Gloria, who were my sisters. And I could hear them having fun and playing their games in the street. And I had to sit up there and practice, and I didn't like that one little bit.

(MUSIC)

MERROW: In her book, "Forbidden Children," Ruth Slencynska tells of practicing the piano beginning at 7 A.M. to earn her breakfast, then another practice to earn lunch followed by yet another session to earn dinner. Now, at age 50 she's considered a musical genius. Reporter Joe Kirchish of Station WGGL talked with Slencynska on stage during the intermission of her performance in Houghton, Michigan. Kirchish asked her about her father's influence.

SLENCYNSKA: He wanted me to be a boy violinist. After all, there were Yehudi Menuhin and Ruggiero Ricci, and there was another boy, named Grischa Vuronov, who had already had a good start in playing the violin. My father had been a violinist, and he figured, well, he

could produce a boy violinist. And I came along, and all right, so I was a girl, he still gave violin lessons. And he found out I had perfect pitch, because after his students would have their lessons, I would scramble up in front of the piano, and I could pick out all of their tunes accurately on pitch. So, I had perfect pitch, and he showed me the notes on the piano and figured he would give me my first baby violin, and I proceeded to have my first and only tantrum, broke the violin, and just would have nothing to do with it. So, he said, "All right, you seem to like the piano, the piano you will get." And that's what I got.

KIRCHISH: Now, that you finally did grow up and started to travel and performed so many thousands of time all over the world, how do you as an individual think about yourself? What I mean by that is, we can look at you and say, here's a woman who's done all of these things as a pianist. But, as a human being, what does it mean to travel all over the world and perform these concerts?

SLENCYNSKA: Well, it was terribly exciting for me to have all of these new experiences and marvelous things happened. But until I was about forty or so, I lived in New York, and I would come back from some of these long concert tours. I had this little tiny apartment, and I once remember waking up, and I didn't even know where I was, because my first thought was: what program tonight? And I woke up and I was in my own apartment. I thought to myself, "My gosh, here I have to start in all over again, learning a whole new program." I had no particular friends, because I traveled too much, and the only friends I would have would be other singles like me who would be in the profession too and maybe one would be in town, maybe not, or playing concerts someplace, and I began to cry. Everything was so upset to me, and I thought to myself, "If I'm so great, how come I haven't got a nice husband?" Well, right now, I have a very lovely husband, and I have a home, and I have students to come back to. And I have all these concerts to play, so I say, I started to live when all these things happened, and I know how to cope with them now, which I didn't used to know.

KIRCHISH: You also do at times take in students, pupils -- what is your attitude in knowing how far to push a child? You've gone through this since three. What would you do when you teach a child? How fast do you move?

SLENCYNSKA: As fast as the child wants to go, and I keep dangling a little carrot in front, a little carrot to help them a little bit. A little encouragement will go along with it.

KIRCHISH: One final question -- I think is the most important of all since we began with your forbidden childhood. Now, that you've reached this point where you're very very satisfied with it, and, of course, we are too -- have you any regrets about having moved into piano?

SLENCYNSKA: Not at all. No, obviously, in fact, right now I'm saving every penny I can lay my hands on to buy a great big beautiful concert grand so that when I'm a little old lady, maybe 85-90 years old, I can still hobble up to it and make it sound pretty.

(MUSIC -- PIANO)

BLAIR: Ruth Slencynska, concert pianist, talking with Reporter Joe Kirchish of Station WGGL in Houghton, Michigan. Slencynska was identified as gifted at a very early age, then received special attention from a strict father. Early identification is important,

as Special Education Coordinator Marjorie Farrell tells Reporter Mark Poindexter of Station KCUR in Kansas City, Missouri.

MARJORIE FARRELL

MARJORIE FARRELL: These children should be identified as early as possible. Certainly I think we should start the identification at the school level, at kindergarten, first grade. I do believe that if we do not start working with some of these youngsters early, that they are going to lose some of the potential they've indicated, just because it has not been stimulated. It has not been used.

POINDEXTER: You don't see classifying a child as gifted, then, putting that label on him and implying that he should behave as a gifted child, a way of robbing him of his individuality?

FARRELL: No I don't. I think that it would be harmful if we went to a child and said, "You're gifted." Now, granted these children are smart enough to know that they've been isolated out in one way or another, whether it's a self-contained class or by the teacher, by the teacher using him as an errand boy or a paper grader or whatever. So, these children tend to have this feeling, but having it within themselves and having it labeled across your forehead are two different things.

I do think that gifted youngsters, as any child, should be handled with care. We have found that we really have had very few youngsters who have made themselves unpopular through their actions, because they have been in a class for the gifted and talented. I'm sorry to say this, but sometimes the parents have made themselves unpopular with other parents by bragging that "I have a gifted child." "He is in the gifted class," but we haven't really found this among the children. It does, though, take a lot of careful counseling.

POINDEXTER: When a child is designated as gifted, a letter of invitation is sent to his parents. What has been your experience with the parents who receive this letter? Do they immediately get very excited and call you and say, "We knew it all along -- we're glad you found out." What happens?

FARRELL: The general attitude is one of surprise. We had an amazing number of calls and contact from parents who would say, "I didn't realize this at all," and words to this effect. "I didn't realize this," or, "aren't you talking about his brother or his sister," or whatever? "Did you get them mixed up?" We have found many parents who had no idea that their children had this capability.

Now, there are some, yes -- there are some who give the response that you indicated. That, well, at last, someone now is going to do something for my child. And we agree that, yes, at long last someone is going to do something to help this child attain his maximum. So, it's interesting the kinds of reaction we get. Some just take it as a matter of course.

POINDEXTER: After that invitation is received by the parent, what options are open to the parent?

FARRELL: Well, actually, just a yes or no. Yes, I want my child to join or no, I do not. Now, in the no there are options. They can say, no, not at this time or no, but I'd like them to join maybe next year, or whatever. Or just a flat, no, I don't want my child participating. We try to find out why they don't want to participate,

and it comes down usually to the fact that they do not want the child to leave his home neighborhood, because most of these children have to be transported. Or that they are satisfied with his progress in regular class, and they don't see any reason to make the shift into a strange school.

POINDEXTER: Can you give me a rough estimate of what percentage say yes?

FARRELL: In the past two years our percentage has been just around fifty percent, which is not as good as we'd like for it to be. We worry, then, about the youngsters who are still in regular classrooms who are not having the advantage of this special program. And, thus far, we have not been able to evolve a program that will go back and handle that situation.

MERROW: Marjorie Farrell, a Special Education Coordinator talking with Reporter Mark Poindexter of KCUK, Kansas City.

BLAIR: John, she said that fifty percent of the parents of gifted children keep their children out of the special programs, because of convenience or out of fear that their child will become too different.

MERROW: Yet, you know, in other places parents are militant about having programs for gifted children. Two such parents are Fred and Sue Weber, who talked with Connie Goldman in Minneapolis. The Webers see parents as responsible too.

FRED AND SUE WEBER

FRED WEBER: We have three children, seven, five and three, and the first two have been identified as gifted. And we're in, as I said, Robinsdale School District, and so far we're very pleased, because it seems to be the kind of school district that is looking for ways to keep education up to people, which is maybe an awkward way of saying it, but it's an extremely progressive school district. They are willing in many cases to spend money in spite of the people who come and tell them not to spend money, to do a good job and to make -- to experiment and find ways of educating children that may be very appropriate today.

So, we've been happy. Robinsdale is the only school district in the state that has a full-time coordinator for the gifted. There are others that have part-time coordinators. She's been working very hard, and generally speaking, each school has some method by which they are trying to identify children who may be gifted and trying to address themselves to it. So, we're happy with the progress at this point.

GOLDMAN: Have you had any fears or worries that your children, who are exceptional, wouldn't have the opportunities that you wished for them?

SUE WEBER: No, I think that the main goal of most of us as parents is to make these children well-rounded individuals. Many of us are finding that as gifted kids they're sort of lopsided in the intellectual area and have some social adjustments or some problems getting along with their peer groups. And I think for most of us the wish is that they learn to get along with children their own age, learn to live in the world satisfactorily and still get their needs satisfied.

GOLDMAN: How can parents help? Don't these children resist your interfering?

SUE WEBER: Yes, I guess they do. In thinking about our own case, our children are not athletically inclined at all. They're not outdoor children. They would prefer to stay inside or read or color or write. And they do resist our attempts to make them be like other children and to do the things that other children do. It is a problem.

FRED WEBER: It's our problem. No, really, and we've talked a lot about that lately, that it's our problem that we want them to conform, because we have ideas about what normal children should be, and when our children don't seem to be behaving in a normal way, we want to force them into it. You know, you should be outside on a nice day, and you should learn to play baseball. And there is a misconception about gifted children, that they are not athletically inclined or that they can't do other things. Well, many gifted children can. Ours don't. And it's really our problem in learning more about them and in learning how to make them happier with themselves, because I'm afraid that what we're doing to them is making them unhappy about theirselves. We're making them feel that they don't fit and that they aren't normal. And we have to get over that ourselves.

GOLDMAN: What a strange dilemma, to know that you have children that are different and yet to know that they can't really develop their differences unless they have a lot of the sameness of us all, so, what a dilemma when you try to encourage both the individuality and the conformist attitude.

SUE WEBER: Exactly. I think that's a problem that we all face, and there's really no great solution to it yet.

FRED WEBER: And it certainly is the problem that school districts are facing, because generally speaking, school districts are set up to take care of kids who are in the broad middle category or whatever you're talking about, but they too are trying to find ways for each individual child to develop and, yet, they have to force him into courses that are designed for all children. So, the parents and the school systems are facing the same problems.

SUE WEBER: I think that in our experience and in many other parents' experience, what makes the difference in the schools, at least, is the teacher. The individual teacher can kind of make or break the situation, and fortunately this year our older child has a teacher that seems to appreciate his good qualities, is able to overlook his emotional troubles or his antsiness, or his inability to keep his mouth shut, that sort of thing, and I think many times these gifted kids become a thorn in the teacher's side if she doesn't care for this type of child, if she's not equipped to handle him. He becomes an annoyance, and we've appreciated very much the fact that the administration at the elementary school that our son attends goes to great lengths to match the teacher and the child with the compatible personalities and tries to find a teacher that will encourage the best aspects of the child, as well as to develop the areas that need work.

GOLDMAN: Do you think that there's often a confusion between the stupid child that creates chaos in a class and the very bright child that also creates chaos in a class?

FRED WEBER: Absolutely. I think they tend to be lumped into that category called learning problems. And sometimes it's very difficult

by just looking at the behavior of the student to determine whether his problem is that he is unable to learn or whether his problem is that he is terribly able to learn or terribly bored or not being taken care of the proper way. So, I very much agree.

BLAIR: Fred and Sue Weber of Minneapolis.

(MUSIC -- "Never Say No")

The parents we've heard emphasize that the gifted child may be seen as merely a problem in the classroom. The teacher makes all the difference. And it's probably good to recall what Dr. Bruce Boston said earlier -- the gifted child is first of all a child.

(MUSIC)

John talks with another gifted child, twelve-year-old Matt Rosen, about his favorite subject.

MERROW: Tell me what you do when you go home.

MATT ROSEN

MATT ROSEN: Today I'm going to be developing film. When I go home -- I've bought some books on "Stellar Evolution" and "Frontiers of Astronomy" by Fred Hoyle; you know, he's like Asimov, but he knows a lot more because he's an astronomer. I read these books over the weekend and in school in our free periods.

I'll be developing -- I've got my developing tools here, because their dark room isn't so good. It's not that light-proof, but then, neither is mine, because I don't have one. So, I can't enlarge. I enlarge over friends of my father's house, because my father works at a college, and they've got a lot of dark rooms at the college.

MERROW: You got interested in this, then, through your father?

ROSEN: Well, yeah, my father's a photo bug, but the real spark started up when a man, who does a lot of photography work -- we were down . . .

MERROW: Who's he?

ROSEN: Well -- he's one of the astronomy instructors, but he heads the photography bit, so, he was down there, and he said they were going to be doing all kinds of stuff. And I got all kinds of enthused and I talked to my father about it, because my father's got a lot of pictures; he's got a lot of equipment, like all this equipment, this old tank, is my father's. And we bought these a few weeks ago. He gave me a lot of advice, and we really get into it, because my father's an old photo bug, and we have something to talk about now.

He'd tell me things like what the wide angle stuff would do and all kinds of little tricks. And a lot of my friends -- I've got a lot of friends at school -- they'd show me other tricks they know, because I know a lot of people who do photography.

MERROW: Tell me about your friends at school.

ROSEN: Well, not many of my school age friends -- I have a teacher I like named Mr. Wright -- he does all kinds of things with me. He showed me one or two tricks, like when you're printing, you put a little extra developer around the face to make it stand out, and he

showed me all kinds of things. But photography isn't my main interest. It's more astronomy. I like reading about astronomy more and thinking up theories, because there's a lot of problems that have to be answered.

MERROW: We kind of got off the subject of the question, which was your friends at school. What do you do with your friends, kids your age?

ROSEN: Well, I don't hang around with them much, but don't take that as a sign.

MERROW: A sign of what?

ROSEN: As a sign that kids don't like each other. I'm one of the strange people -- I just keep to myself mostly. The thing is I'm rather different than the other kids. I just like to stay around myself and read my books. And the other kids like to play sports.

MERROW: That doesn't seem to be true. I mean, you were the first kid that came up to me and asked me what this machine was and asked me what I was doing.

ROSEN: Well, I like to talk to adults more than I like to talk to kids.

MERROW: How come?

ROSEN: Well, because when I talk to kids I have to sort of speak down to them, and I feel awkward. So, when I talk to adults I may not be as smart as they are, which is sort of refreshing, because I like to talk to people who can teach me things than talking to people I have to teach, because I don't like telling other people what words mean when I say them. I like to ask what words mean when someone else says them.

MERROW: There must be kids who are smarter than you are and just as there are probably adults that don't know as much as you do. I certainly don't know as much about astronomy as you do.

ROSEN: Well, I hope I find kids smarter than I am. You know, I'm not smarter than many adults. I don't think I am. I'm proud of it -- I like learning.

MERROW: Well, there's a difference in being smarter than someone than knowing more than someone.

ROSEN: Yeah I know.

MERROW: I mean I probably know more about some things than you do, but you know more about some things than I do.

ROSEN: Um, right, and that's the thing, like I like to ask people -- like when I asked you about the tape recorder. And I enjoy asking questions and learning about things I don't know much about.

MERROW: Tell me about school. How do you find the routine of five days of public school?

ROSEN: It's okay, I guess. It's a little hard sometimes when you're thinking of other things. I got a bad mark in math in the first

quarter, but I brought it up to a 99. It was pretty hard work, but I brought it up.

MERROW: How come you got a bad mark and what was the bad mark?

ROSEN: Well, the bad mark I got, I think a 75 or a C. The thing was - it takes me a little bit of adjustment when I'm in school. I try and keep around that, but I get pretty good results. I do pretty good in school. I don't get bad grades, except maybe in gym, because I don't like gym.

MERROW: Do you find that other kids single you out, because you're smart?

ROSEN: Well, yeah, they single me out, call me names, but they don't usually call me names because I'm smart. They say that I'm different, and they call me things that they call each other, you know, that I don't like repeating. They're not nice things.

MERROW: Go ahead. What do they call you?

ROSEN: Well, I mean.

MERROW: They call each other the same names, though?

ROSEN: Yeah, but they mean it about me, because -- I don't know if they're jealous or not. They just don't like me, but then, I don't like them much either.

MERROW: But it doesn't sound as if from what you said that you try to hide your brains in any way.

ROSEN: No. I mean I don't like correcting other peoples' speech. I learned a long time ago -- I don't correct what other people say, but I tell a lot of answers. Sometimes I talk to the teachers when they talk to the students, or something like that. I used to be embarrassed when everybody would stare at me, but I'm not anymore, because I like talking to teachers.

MERROW: Well, let's go have lunch and teach each other some new vocabulary words. Okay?

ROSEN: Yeah.

(MUSIC)

BLAIR: By the way, John, I've noticed an improvement in your vocabulary since you met Matt.

MERROW: Thanks, Wendy. Being teased is part of growing up, and apparently gifted children everywhere are often the butt of jokes. Parents on the lower end of the economic scale are quicker to stifle their children's extraordinary intellectual talents, according to Henry Collis of Great Britain and Professor George Robb of Canada. I talked with them at a recent planning session of the World Council for the Gifted. First, George Robb.

GEORGE ROBB

GEORGE ROBB: The parents in the upper socio-economic levels are articulate, more so than the people at the other end of the socio-economic scale. They have some reason to be grateful to education.

Their attitudes towards education are different. Parental attitude toward education is the most single, the most important single thing that affects how a child does in school, so, we are in a position where inevitably we are dealing with a disproportionate instance of intellectual giftedness across the socio-economic scales.

We are here very much concerned, also, with the "gifted handicapped child" or "minority gifted children."

MERROW: If socio-economic status is determinate of verbal fluency, flexibility, use of the language, does it follow then that you find gifted kids in a lower socio-economic scale are gifted in other ways disproportionately -- musically, athletically?

HENRY COLLIS

HENRY COLLIS: I don't think that's been our experience. No, it hasn't. We have the greatest difficulty in identifying them, of course, in the very poor families, because the families are resistant to this word gifted. They are frightened of it in the UK, because they're teased by their neighbors, and their children get a bad time at school. And we'll have them definitely telling their children to under achieve if they get a suspicion they're gifted.

MERROW: You say in the United Kingdom, but isn't that true in this country also?

COLLIS: I think there's one great difference. This country has been wise enough to score them the "gifted and talented." And that is a very lesser motive description than just the one word "gifted," which we use in the UK.

MERROW: It's kind of okay to socially be talented, but it's bad to be gifted?

COLLIS: Yes, right, because talented you can see and hear, and there's proof in it. And gifted in England just means something that could be an egghead, you know, and it's a limited word, anyway.

ROBB: One can be talented with a paint brush or in ballet class or talented in mathematics -- that's a lot less threatening than being described as gifted, which suggests a generalizable quality, which is very often the case.

MERROW: You mentioned the problems that parents have in your home countries. I suppose those might well be applicable here too. Would you describe some of the problems.

COLLIS: Well, one of the problems which you get in a very deprived, socially deprived home, is, of course, that both parents come home at perhaps four or five o'clock, having done a very hard day's work. A child comes home at eleven with perhaps the mental age of 13 or 14, and they just can't answer the questions in the evening. There's no culture in the background. There are no good books, no good pictures, no good programs on television to watch, because the parents don't want them, and no good discussion.

And in some cases we've had, one parent has communicated just a little better to the child and, therefore, the child swings to that parent entirely, shuts off the other. And we get a divorce on our hands, because they have a so-called gifted child.

And the other problem is that, not all, but many of these children do have this very short sleep pattern. We have the record case I've met since I became director three years ago -- a deputy head mistress, whose son only slept one hour a night for the first five years of his life. Well, I call that a problem for parents.

MERROW: Yes, I can imagine that as a problem.

ROBB: It's quite often the case that, not intending to be unkind, parents imagine they've got silk purses when, in fact, they've got a sow's ear. Or, if you like, a swan and a goose and things like that. And it's ominously frequently the case in my experience that some parents choose to relive their own lost dreams again. That they make it clear to their youngster -- the young child I'm talking particularly about. Now, they're very much approved of, indeed, when they can do surprising things for a five or a six-year-old. And that tends, of course, to be reinforced, to be a vicious circle. And the youngster finds a conflict between the kind of things that bring him approval at home, and if he does that in the classroom, the other youngsters will rapidly go off, because who always likes being second -- see?

There's a very real risk for the long-term interests of the child if he or she believes that it's in his best interest to be intellectually profitably involved, and so on because the happiest child is likely to be one that's reasonably equally developed physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

MERROW: Kind of in the middle.

ROBB: Well, perhaps so. I'm sure it's the case that in somebody like Norbert Wiener, to take a case in point, who made an enormous contribution to society. He was not a happy man, who got his Harvard Ph.D. at the age of 17 and so on, not at all a happy chap. I think society has and will benefit from the -- I'll say eccentric, the assymetrically developed personality, the oddball who has got a certain thing to give.

MERROW: That's a different problem than Henry's pointing out. That's a problem of parents who are encouraging their child to be gifted, and then the child has trouble in his other social milieu. But I'm also interested in the question when there's a gifted child and that giftedness is not encouraged in the home or not developed in the home.

ROBB: Oh, that's beyond argument. Henry and I could talk at considerable length about children we both know in Britain who've been exposed to this. And, you know, like how do you do in football, when he really wants to tell about how he's able to do calculus or whatever.

And I can remember a child in a remote part of England who was very bright indeed, and his mom had been a teacher. She'd given up being a teacher to become a mom. His father had given up teaching to become a head teacher, and the mom used to meet him on the way home from school: "How did you do in school today?" And at the age of five, he'd say, "Oh, it's just a lot of kid stuff." "Well, I know, dear," she said, "but let's get on with the astrophysics." And this would be fine, and he'd be interested because this was the most challenging and intellectual thing that would have happened to him since he went to school that day. But after twenty minutes, he'd want to put down his rocket fuel formally and play with blocks or bricks or sand or water like you have to if you're five and hope to be a healthy six. And only then, did he experience maternal disapproval.

Now, you see, she was providing one of the, well, not quite optimal environments as far as intellectual development was concerned, and a very bad one indeed, in terms of his emotional development.

MERROW: It's a toughie, because is there any kind of guidance for parents in your countries and my country?

COLLIS: I think we can give them a little bit of help, but you can't always keep parents normal. I was interviewing one boy when I was a school master, and the parents were waiting out in the office, and this boy came into my study. He was a boy of ten, and I said, "Well, how are you today?" And he said, "Quite normal, sir, despite my parents." And he wasn't being cheeky. He wasn't being precocious. He was just stating his mind. When they came in, I knew he was dead right.

BLAIR: Henry Collis, Director of the National Association for Gifted Children in Great Britain, and George Robb, a Professor at York University in Canada, demonstrating that parenting gifted children can be a problem in other countries as well. One cause of the problem is a general hostility that seems to pervade much of American society against eggheads, what Richard Hofstader described in his book, "Anti-Intellectualism in American Life."

MERROW: That hostility is often transmitted to the parents and to the gifted children themselves. But if the idea of elitism is hard to swallow, some parents overreact in the other direction, and become tutors and publicists for their own children -- putting aside the parental role.

BLAIR: But conflict and confusion seem inevitable, because every child and every situation are different. Here's more from those Minneapolis parents, talking with Reporter Connie Goldman.

MINNEAPOLIS PARENTS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

PARENT: I have lots of different ideas, and they fight each other all the time, because the cases that they happen in, like each of these gifted children has their own thing, and the first thing I would say is that I feel the most gratification in my uproad struggle when my son comes to either myself or my husband and says, "You know, after all, when you talk about these things with me, you're my best friend." He has no friends. I mean, it's a constant struggle to find someone on equal plain. Okay, we've given up as far as age is concerned, finding someone in his age category, because there just isn't anyone. But he is experiencing now a group of gifted children from kindergarten through six, and he enjoys the kindergartner fully as much as the sixth grader, because they have intellectual things to share.

I don't know. I think we have a dual problem in that sizewise he is very large too. He's five feet, almost five foot one, and he just turned nine years old. Our son has a cousin that's 23 months older than he is, and he has cousins that are one or two months younger -- the one that's 23 months older keeps wondering, "why can't I do these things." Or, why could our son read at three and a half to this boy who was entering kindergarten? You know, when their first challenge comes, they're really stymied, because everything comes so naturally. So, we bought a yahtzee game that we were going to play, because we knew he was interested in math when he was four,

so that the family could play it together. He's an only child, and when he was home sick for two days, in the house, confined completely, he taught himself multiplication, because of the three sets of dice or four sets of dice, and here four times six is thus.

And the first time that something came that he really was faced with something how to learn, it was a situation where "it isn't coming easily -- it's not natural -- what do I do now?"

PARENT: We started out in kindergarten with our child in the public schools, and he was labeled a problem in kindergarten, because when the teacher would ask him to go over and turn on the light, he'd say, "Would you like to know how the light switch works?" And this sent the teacher right up the wall, so he was labeled as a behavior problem.

The class experience in the beginning was a disaster for him. He had not learned, either in public school or in private school, to apply himself to a problem. He had not learned to sit down and follow something through from the beginning to the end, unless he really wanted to do it. And the reason he hadn't done this was because he had everything memorized. If his teacher asked him what's twelve times twelve, he knew it. If the teacher asked him what's -- you know, he could do these things so fast in his head that he never had to sit down and figure it out.

GOLDMAN: So, what you seem to be implying is all kinds of behavior problems and confusion about self can result from being a gifted child in a situation where they can't expand into their potential.

PARENT: Well, I think it's frustrating because, for instance, a gifted child, at least mine, when he's in first grade, he'll read a book and he'll find out something about the British Isles, let's say, and he'll run out to his playmates who are also in the first grade. And he'll say, "Hay, did you know that the British Isles have a population of thus and such?" Well, and then I listen and I hear the little kids say, "What's the British Isles?" And he says, "Well, that's another name for England, and it's an island." And by this time, I look at the kids, and they're all out playing tag. And there he is standing there with his beautiful new fact that he just learned and he wanted to share with someone. And he's got nobody his own age to share it with.

PARENT: Gifted people are able to absorb their environment or their circumstances at a more rapid rate and, therefore, they reach the bottom of the bucket more rapidly. And there's where boredom comes in, and we found that as a family we had made a point of taking our family on extended trips to museums, to concerts, to new explorations down along the St. Croix, the Mississippi, Red Lake, Minnesota River, wherever, and, in effect, putting them in contact with more and more substance to absorb. And low and behold, they began then self generating, like you might say, a nuclear pile -- they interact with themselves and actually get four out of the knowledge of only two.

And I think that when parents are unable to do this because of their social attitudes or their money limitations, they're wreaking havoc with anything that schools may be able to do with rare exceptions and if the students in school cannot therefore be reinforced at home, then we're in trouble, because we're throwing our school money for the gifted down the drain.

BLAIR: Being with the kids, on camping trips or whatever, just has to be important, whether your children are classified as gifted or not. The children probably feel ths way too, if this conversation John had with a young Connecticut girl is any indication.

MERROW: Tell me three people you admire the most in the whole world.

HELEN JACKSON

HELEN JACKSON: Mrs. Currin -- she's a teacher down at school. Laura --

MERROW: Who's Laura?

JACKSON: She's a teacher of ecology. And my father.

MERROW: Terrific. Thanks very much. That's Helen Jackson.

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MERROW: Next week, on the final program in this series, we'll be taking a close look at the politics of educating the gifted, and we'll be talking about money. Join us.

(MUSIC)

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